

Series II  
Subjects Files,  
1916-1973

Box 15, Folder 6

Notes by ADM T.C.  
Kindaid on Battle of  
Leyte Gulf,  
1944

1007

Special Notes by Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid

to

Chapter X.

The Sho-Plan---The Battle for Leyte Gulf.

The notes are keyed to numerals in text.)

(Explanatory material in brackets, inserted by author.)

1. The invasion armada was "MacArthur's armada" in the sense that it came from his area, S.W.P.A. (Southwest Pacific Area), and might well be called the "great armada from Down Under" (or from MacArthur's area, or S.W.P.A.), MacArthur derived his authority from the Combined Chiefs of Staff. He was designated "Supreme Commander" in S.W.P.A. and was specifically prohibited from taking personal command of any of his forces. He was required to exercise command through his three major commanders for land, sea and air, Blamey (General Sir George Blamey, Australian Army General commanding land forces); Kinkaid, and Kenney (General George C. Kenney, U. S. Army Air Forces, commanding air forces).

From the time we departed from ports in the Admiralties and New Guinea to invade the Philippines, I had direct command of the "armada", including the Army forces embarked, until I turned over command of the Army forces ashore in Leyte to Krueger (Lt.

Gen. Walter Krueger, commanding Sixth Army). MacArthur was present as a passenger in his capacity as Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area. I exercised direct command, as witness the fact that I decided to go ahead with the operation without referring to MacArthur when Halsey sent a despatch, received when we were a few hours out from Hollandia, stating that he was concentrating his forces to attack the Japanese fleet and would not be able to give the planned support to our landing at Leyte. When MacArthur joined our convoy, I sent him a bridge signal: "Welcome to our city." He replied with a gracious message referring to the fact that this was the first time he had sailed under my command and ending with: "Believe it or not we are on our way."

2. Nishimura was due in Leyte one hour before Kurita. He was ahead of schedule without reason--a serious error in a coordinated effort. Kurita was late for good and sufficient reasons.

3. The Seventh Fleet had eighteen CVE's. Two had been sent to Halmahera for replacement planes and only sixteen were present during the action. The Seventh Fleet had a few PBV's, tender-based. Counting eighteen CVE's, the total number of (U.S.) carriers was thirty-four.

4. It is interesting that the Darter and Dace passed Kurita through the night in Palawan Passage and attacked at dawn--a good job. An extremely important fact, from the operations point of view, is that Kurita was separated from most of his communi-

tion personnel in the transfer from Atago to Kishanani to Yamato. Any naval commander will sympathize with him in that situation.

5. Only one strike was made on Nishimura and that only by small search-attack scouting groups. Davison (Rear Admiral Ralph E. Davison, commanding Task Group 38.4 of the Third Fleet) reported that the move to concentrate was taking him out of range of the enemy Southern Force but Halsey continued the concentration. In the Seventh Fleet we felt well able to take care of the (enemy) southern force and had all day to make plans for its reception. I was not informed directly by Halsey that he was leaving Nishimura to me.

6. Halsey had ordered a morning search to northward by the northern group but Jap attacks prevented it from getting off until the afternoon.

7. In the Seventh Fleet we had counted noses carefully and had come to the conclusion that only two BB's (battleships) --Ise and Hyuga--could be with Ozawa in the (enemy) northern force.

8. Halsey had four groups of carriers and had given preparatory orders to form TF (Task Force) 34. "...proceeding north with three groups" is phraseology which failed to give information of vital import not only to me and to Nimitz but to many others. Mitscher (Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, commanding Task Force 38 --the four carrier task groups and their supporting combat ships of the Third Fleet) actually sent instructions for the employment

of the two BB's which were to stay with him, believing that TF 34 would be left behind to guard San Bernardino. It was impossible to believe anything else. The proposed composition of TF 34 was exactly correct in the circumstances.

Even though Halsey banked "too heavily" on the exaggerated claims of his pilots, he knew from the Independence night search planes that Kurita was headed for San Bernardino and he should have realized:

1. That the composition of the Seventh Fleet was designed to provide support for the amphibious landing and the troops ashore--not for major combat. Slow speed of the old battleships and a high proportion of high capacity projectiles in their magazines made them an inadequate adversary for the Japanese central force, even if they had been available and were filled with fuel and ammunition.

2. That the Seventh Fleet would be engaged through the night with surface forces in Surigao Strait and, in any case, could not leave Leyte Gulf unguarded and take station off San Bernardino.

3. That the three CVE groups of the Seventh Fleet would be on station at daylight 25 Oct. carrying out their mission and would need cover.

4. That my destroyers would have expended their torpedoes in Surigao Strait and that the battleships would be low in AP ammunition and even in H.C. ammunition, having rendered gun-fire support to forces ashore for several days.

9. Rarely has a commander had all day to stay quietly (except

for the antics of Jap planes) in port and prepare without serious interruption for a night action. The tactical dispositions and plans of the Seventh Fleet were checked and counter-checked by all concerned.

10. I believe contact was made about 2215 (10.15 P.M.) a few miles south of Bohol Island. All three PT's of that group were damaged by gunfire and unable to report the contact but one of them (using his head) managed to make contact with the next PT group to eastward which sent through a message, which was received by Oldendorf (Rear Admiral J. E. Oldendorf, who was in tactical or direct command at Surigao Strait) about twenty-six minutes after midnight.

11. Fired by P.T. 137. The P.T. fired at a destroyer, missed, but hit and badly damaged the cruiser (Abukuma).

12. No, we did not think that the Jap central force was west of the Philippines, but we did think that TF 34 was guarding San Bernardino.

Also, it is of interest that in Leyte Gulf the temporary headquarters of the Army commanders were only a few yards from the water's edge and the beaches were piled high with food and supplies and ammunition for immediate use. Destruction of those supply dumps would have left our forces ashore without food and ammunition. Halsey has said that Kurita could only have "harassed" our forces in Leyte Gulf.

13. I think it should be pointed out that the first six words of Kimitz's despatch was "padding" (inserted by the communications officer for code security). The despatch was first brought to me without padding, as it should have been. Later I was told of the "padding." (Halsey originally took this phrase --"All the world wants to know..." as tacit criticism of him and was irritated.)

14. The attack of the DD's (destroyers) and DE's (destroyer escorts) against the Jap heavy ships was the most courageous and also the most effective incident brought to my attention during the war.

15. Kurita committed a grave error in losing tactical control of his force. He had lost most of his communication personnel. He had been seriously damaged by torpedo hits from Seventh Fleet planes and surface ships and by bomb hits from Seventh Fleet planes, and the upper works of his ships, chart house, radio, etc. suffered from 5-inch shellfire and from strafing. His ships sheered out of formation to dodge torpedo attacks, real or dummy, made by planes and escort vessels. Soon his individual units became widely separated, which he should not have permitted, and he could not see his forces, or the enemy's, because of the heavy smoke laid by the CVE's and their escorts. He was confused and his subordinates did not help him by reporting the nature of the enemy they were attacking. Ozawa had failed to inform him of his success in drawing Halsey away. Also, I have no doubt that Kurita was physically exhausted after three gruelling days.

16. McCain sensed what was going on long before Halsey did and he launched his strike beyond range for a return flight-- 340 miles.

The following paragraphs constitute my analysis of what occurred.

Halsey had done exactly what the Japs wanted him to do.

He had left San Bernardino unguarded, permitting Kurita to pass through the Strait unopposed. Having taken all six of his BB's 300 miles to the north, when two would have been adequate and four were needed at San Bernardino, he belatedly at 11.15 turned south in response to my appeals and to the despatch from Nimitz, again taking all six BB's with him and leaving Mitscher without any. Mitscher urgently needed two BB's. By that time, 11.15, Mitscher's planes had developed Ozawa's force and the Ise and Hyuga were known to be with him but Halsey took all six BB's south. Later Mitscher sent DuBose (Rear Admiral Laurence T. DuBose) to mop up the cripples (with four cruisers and twelve destroyers). Ozawa was informed of the actions of DuBose, and sent the Ise and Hyuga south to look for him. Fortunately the Jap BB's passed to eastward of our cruisers on their way south and again on their return course to northward.

Halsey informed me that he would arrive off San Bernardino at 0800 26 Oct. Too late! Later at 1600 (4 P.M.), after fueling, he decided to speed up and took two of his fastest BB's, Iowa and New Jersey, with three cruisers and eight DD's, south at 28 knots. He missed Kurita entering the Strait by two hours. Suppose he had intercepted him? Were two BB's enough?



Suppose Halsey had turned south at top speed immediately upon receipt of my first urgent message at 0825. He would have been about five hours closer to San Bernardino. Actually he steamed north for 2 and three-quarters hours at 25 knots--69 miles, whereas if he had steamed south at 28 knots--77 miles--there would have been a total of 146 miles difference in his 11.15 position.

The net result of all of this was that the six strongest battleships in the world--except the Yamato and Musashi--steamed about 300 miles north and 300 miles south during the "greatest naval battle of the Second World War and the largest engagement ever fought upon the high seas"--and they did not fire a single shot. I can well imagine the feelings of my classmate, Lee (Rear Admiral Willis A. Lee, commanding the battleships of Third Fleet.)

Even today Halsey believes it was not a mistake to take the whole 3rd Fleet north and he apparently overlooks the fact that the absence of TF 34 from San Bernardino Strait precluded the total destruction of Kurita's force on the spot, to say nothing of the loss of American lives and ships of the CVE force. The threat to our invasion of the Philippines seems not to have come to his mind. Halsey has stated that I should have sent CVE planes to scout the Sibuyan Sea and San Bernardino Strait during the night of 24-25 Oct. As is evident, I believed that TF 34 was guarding San Bernardino and that Lee was being kept informed by the night flying planes from the Independence. Actually, I did order a search to the northward during the night by P.B.Y's and a search toward San Bernardino at daylight by CVE planes, mostly

out of curiosity to find out what was going on.

Even if I had known that San Bernardino was wide open, I did not have the force to meet Kurita. You have quoted me correctly from "Battle Report." I would not have denuded Leyte Gulf of a defense force. I would have moved the CVE's clear of direct contact with Kurita's surface forces. And, of course, I would have sent planes from the CVE's to keep track of Kurita, although none were equipped or trained for night search.

In that case would Kurita have reached Leyte? It is interesting to speculate. It is very possible. His direct contact with the northern group of CVE's, though painful to us, delayed his progress, seriously damaged his forces and so confused him that he turned back when within two hours of his goal.

17. "Divided command" is, of course, not sound procedure. The hard, cold fact is, however, that despite the divided command both Halsey and I had what appeared to me to be clear-cut definite missions. Had Halsey been mindful of his covering mission when Ozawa beckoned him to come north, he never would have left San Bernardino wide open. Also, he would have told me in a clearly worded despatch just what he was going to do about it.

The "unwarranted assumption" which you attribute to me probably refers to my assumption that TF 34 was guarding San Bernardino. Perhaps that was unwarranted, but, to my not unprejudiced mind, all logic seems to point the other way. Halsey's mission included covering our amphibious operation from interruption by the Japanese fleet. His preparatory order to form

TF 34, which I intercepted, set up a plan to guard San Bernardino against the passage of Kurita's forces which was perfect in concept and perfect in composition of the forces assigned to TF 34. I did not intercept further modifying messages regarding TF 34. Had I done so, I most certainly would not have remained silent.

It was inconceivable that Halsey could have scrapped a perfect plan. His message "going north with three groups" meant to me that TF 34 plus a carrier group was being left behind--entirely sound. Not only did I and my staff believe it, and Kimitz, and, presumably, his staff believe it, but Mitscher and his staff believed it also. As I have already pointed out, Mitscher actually gave orders for utilization of the two battleships which were to accompany him on the northern trek (four of the Third Fleet's six battleships were to have been left behind in TF 34 to guard San Bernardino; two were to have gone north with Mitscher's carriers after Ozawa). When Mitscher and his staff found out that TF 34 was not being left to guard the Strait, his chief of staff--(Captain) Arleigh Burke, tried to get Mitscher to send a message to Halsey on the subject but Mitscher declined on the ground that Halsey probably had information not known to him.

Later in your notes you point out that I did not specifically ask Halsey whether or not TF 34 was guarding San Bernardino until 0412 25 Oct. That is correct. In the absence of information to the contrary from Halsey, anything else was unthinkable. Early in the morning of 25 Oct. a meeting of the staff was held

in my cabin to check for errors of commission or of omission. It broke up about 0400 and my operations officer, Dick Gruzen (Captain Richard H. Gruzen), came back into the cabin and said, "Admiral, I can think of only one other thing. We have never directly asked Halsey if TF 34 is guarding San Bernardino." I told him to send the message.

18. The controversy has not been bitter for the simple and sole reason that I refused to take part in it. I have not publicly stated my side of the case but have kept quiet for ten years--not so Halsey. He has published several articles or interviews in addition to his book endeavoring to justify his actions at Leyte, sometimes at my expense.

19. I believe that the radio on Ozawa's flagship went out with the first bomb hit but other ships could have sent a message to Kurita for him.

20. Only Halsey's strangely phrased message led to Kurita's surprise of Sprague's carriers.

In the early morning some important message from me to Halsey were delayed in transmission and that should not have been.

21. Actually 1 or 2 P.B.Y.'s took off from a tender in Surigao Strait to make the northern night search. They were ill equipped for that sort of a mission. They had quite a hell of a time because every U.S. ship they came near fired at them. I imagine

that their greatest concern was to avoid U.S. ships rather than to find Jap ships.

The dawn search ordered from the CVE's should have gotten off much earlier.

22. Halsey's writings in the Naval Institute Proceedings were subjective. If he had been mindful of his covering mission, and had no other distractions, the question of "a single naval command" would be purely academic.

23. Halsey's reasoning regarding the (enemy) center force falls short of the mark. His "careful evaluation" of the damage reports was not shared by everyone. Kurita's movements seemed to belie any such evaluation. We knew from our plot that Kurita was approaching San Bernardino at 22 knots. Some plodding! Halsey had a later report from the Independence plane which was not forwarded to me. Did he not plot Kurita's progress?

A scout of noses by my staff showed that Ozawa's force could not have been as "powerful and dangerous" as Halsey seems to have thought. He took 119 ships north to deal with 19 ships in the (enemy northern force. An intelligent division of his forces was in order. In setting up TF 34, he had actually made that intelligent division of forces but he failed to implement it.

Halsey's decisions (a) and (b) would have been sound if he had had no other obligations. His decision (c) can be described only as erroneous. I doubt if anyone will disagree with the statement that the only reason why Kurita did not reach Leyte

Gulf, destroying the CVE's en route, was that he turned back when victory was within his grasp. His (Halsey's) judgment as to the "fatally weakened condition of the (enemy) center force" was definitely shown to be in error. Did his "judgment which was happily vindicated" include a forecast that Kurita would break off the action? If so, his crystal ball was certainly in fine working order. Does anyone believe in the "Japs" inability to deal with the CVE's and small "fry?" They did not deal with them as they could have, but is that "inability?"

24. I am quoted correctly, but I did not have an opportunity to edit my remarks. In the last line "one head would not have altered things" might have been reworded because it meant that "one head would not have produced a better end result if both Halsey and I had carried out our specific missions."